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1836



Price, George R. C.

An oration delivered
before the philelutherian
society of Georgetown college
on the fourth of July.
1836.





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Book G 353
1836

AN ORATION

DELIVERED BEFORE

THE PHILELEUTHERIAN SOCIETY,

Of Georgetown College,

ON THE FOURTH OF JULY,

BY GEO. R. C. PRICE, V.A.

TO WHICH ARE PREFIXED,

THE REMARKS OF JOS. G. CHEVALLIER,

PREVIOUS TO HIS READING

THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE.

WASHINGTON:

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1836.

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GEORGETOWN COLLEGE, *July 6th, 1836.*

MESSRS. PRICE, AND Jos. CHEVALLIE.

In compliance with a resolution of the Phileleuthrian Society, we, the undersigned, return you thanks for the able manner in which you discharged the duties assigned to you on the 4th instant, and respectfully request a copy for publication.

JNO. CHEVALLIE, Jr.
BENJ. GREEN,
R. GOOCH,

Committee of the Phileleutherian Society.

GEORGETOWN COLLEGE, *July 7th, 1836.*

GENTLEMEN: In conformity with your request, I transmit you, with the approbation of Mr. Chevallie, a copy of the remarks and oration delivered by him and myself, on the Anniversary of our Independence, confident they contain many imperfections, which want of time precludes the possibility of correcting.

With respect,

GEORGE PRICE, Jr.

To MESSRS. JOHN CHEVALLIE, GREEN, }
and Gooch, Committee, &c. }

REMARKS
ON THE
DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE,
By J. G. CHEVALLIE.

Actuated by feelings of no ordinary kind, I come before you, fellow students, in compliance with a custom, which, taking its origin in the purest and holiest of motives, has been sanctioned by the experience of fifty years. And although fully aware of my inability to perform the duty you have imposed upon me, yet relying on your partiality, I enter on its performance without fear or hesitation; convinced that nothing more will be expected of me, in the few remarks I propose making, previous to the reading of the Declaration, than the testimony of a sincere love of our country, and the desire of beholding it prosperous and happy.

The great, and, indeed the only objection which has been made against this custom, one too which does not want its supporters in those, who, boasting of their esteem and veneration for Liberty, are totally ignorant of its sacred principles, is, that it serves to renew recollections of the ancient feuds and wars between the colonies and the mother country, fears which should be hushed in the tomb of forgetfulness, and forever banished from our hearts. But where is the American that does not reject with indignation such a proposal? What! That we should cease to remember the great struggle of the freemen of America against the tyrant of England? That we should bury in oblivion the names of those who offered up their lives, their fortune, and their sacred honor at the hallowed shrine of Liberty, and in defence of those rights which are natural alike

to the poor as to the rich, to the humble shepherd as to the king on the throne? No! God forbid! Rather may the name of my country be blotted from the nations of the earth, and her very existence unknown, than that the glorious deeds of the patriots of North America, deeds which have not had their parallel since the commencement of time, should cease to be remembered.

Yet how false are not the grounds on which the objection rests. For although Americans can never forget the glorious actions of their ancestors in the contest between Liberty and Oppression, yet far are they from entertaining, far are the ceremonies which we have this day to perform, from producing malice or hatred towards England. United by a community of interests and the stronger ties of kindred, we must ever look upon the English as the dearest allies we can possess. What, then, it may be asked, are the advantages to be derived from the perusal of the Declaration? They are numerous and important. From it, we become acquainted with those dear and inestimable rights and privileges which are common to all men, for the maintenance of which our fathers sacrificed so much. We are also taught to defend them when attacked, and we learn this consoling truth, that the power of the wicked availeth nought against the just man. Yet the greatest and most important consideration to be derived from it, is that by its yearly recurrence we are shown how precious a boon is Liberty, the innumerable benefits it brings to the land that possesses it, and the jealousy with which we should guard it against the attacks of those who are daily endeavouring to destroy it. Not for our enjoyment alone did our forefathers obtain this inestimable treasure; and on us devolves the responsibility of handing it down to our posterity as pure and unsullied as it was transmitted to us. To do this, it is absolutely necessary that we should obtain a correct knowledge of its principles: and this is the superior advantage which the reading of the Declaration holds out to us. True patriotism alone should guide us on our way, and not the madness of party spirit, which so often leads into danger, and

blinds us into the commission of errors. Here originate all the evils that can befall the Republic, and too much care cannot be taken to shun its hidden rocks and quicksands. To avoid all these evils it is requisite that we should be aware of the importance of union, without which, according to the express opinion of the Father of his country, our Liberty cannot be preserved. Animated by these convictions, and led on by a firm purpose to defend our country's rights, we will enjoy the triumph of seeing our fears for the safety of the Republic vanish, and the hopes and schemes of our enemies defeated and crushed in the bud.

ORATION,

DELIVERED BEFORE THE PHILELEUTHERIAN SOCIETY,
JULY THE FOURTH, 1836.

BY GEORGE R. C. PRICE.

We have assembled together to evince our gratitude to our benefactors; to show the world that the sacred legacy, sealed and sanctified by the blood of our fathers, has been guarded with a zealous eye, and that their last friendly injunctions have been impressed in indelible characters, upon the hearts of their descendants. Their brilliant achievements have been inscribed upon the brightest scroll of Fame, which was ever pendant from the spangled columns of her temple; the vestal fire still sparkles at its base, and the genius of Freedom, triumphing at the entrance, forbids the polluting retinue of Despotism to stamp corruption upon her hallowed fame.

Of the gallant bands, which accomplished the independence of America, how few remain to witness these consoling celebrations! The last Signer of the Declaration has smoothly glided into the calm haven of eternity.

When the patriotic sons of the Revolution spring, in imagination, from the soil which has been consecrated by their heroic deeds; when the hard-fought field is extended to our view; when the storms of war, thickening over their venerable heads, burst in thunder and wide spread ruin; when the demon of extermination, stalking through their midst, chills each valorous effort, and unnerves the fearless arm; when the orb of Heaven pales beneath the fire of man, and no longer emits its auspicious light; when the din and shout re-echo along the distant plain, and the dense and impenetrable cloud of smoke settles opaquely upon the lurid sky: what restraint shall we, what restraint can we impose upon our feelings.

A brief recital of the causes which led to the separation of the colonies from the mother country; of the measures, which called forth the mighty eloquence of the indignant Chatham and philosophic Burke; of the dire explosion of ministerial vengeance, which fell upon every threshold, and awakened our ancestors to a deep sense of injury and of wrong; will, I think be sufficient.

After the cessation of the long protracted hostilities between France and England, in which the colonies had taken an active part, cheerfully supplying men and money, whenever application was made to their representatives, the ministers began to consult how they might most effectually replenish their exhausted treasury; and accordingly, shortly after Washington had risen upon the ruins of the incautious Braddock, resolutions passed the Parliament to lay stamp duty in America; but were not immediately followed by any legislative act. When this proceeding was first published, it met with no opposition; but in proportion as it was better understood, constitutional objections were urged with much vigor and ability by sagacious statesmen in both countries; yet, notwithstanding the powerful reasons which were adduced against it, notwithstanding the declared wishes of the people, this violent, unprecedented, and pernicious bill, infringing upon their dearest rights and immunities, was again brought forward and finally enacted. This expedient was deferred in its operation, till seven months subsequent to its promulgation; in the interval, the voice of the immortal Henry and of Lee, rang trumpet tongued round the legislative halls of Virginia; their speeches, burning with a love of liberty, were disseminated throughout the land; the press groaned with pamphlets, calling upon the dilatory to arouse from their lethargy; the flame of Liberty burst forth in unclouded splendour from the respective States, whilst appeals replete with vehement and glowing eloquence, taught the throne that, if another torch were cast into the combustible materials already collected, they would swell into a consuming conflagration, which even the queen of the ocean could not extinguish—warned it of the hour of retribution fast

approaching, when the land of Alfred, after having delivered up the object of contention, would mourn over the loss of friends, of parents, and of honor.

The assemblies sounded the alarm; every hand was employed in spreading fire-brands around the pile of tyranny, that a beacon might be formed to guide them through the coming struggle; and amid the trials and darkness which encompassed them, a bright and solitary star glimmering in the heavens, shone congenial upon their path, lighting them to freedom or to death. Conscious rectitude reared them buoyant over every difficulty, solaced them in the gloomy desert of strife and desolation, and poured into the agonizing tortures of wounds and lacerations, the mollifying unction of a righteous cause.

Suffice it to observe, this prospect was not carried into execution; that, with a change of counsellors, the affairs of the colonies, for a brief interval, assumed a more favorable aspect; yet, whilst the repeal of the obnoxious measure produced no little congratulation, the right of taxation being still unrelinquished, and boldly asserted, the country was again flooded with spirited and classical productions. Massachusetts and Virginia, and South Carolina, now bared their arms for the strife, and hastened to repel the encroachments of the haughty King. Every movement of the mother country inspired them with additional ardour, all her manœuvres contributed to accelerate the progress of the dreadful collision. Whilst the billows of the deep wafted intelligence of the daily violation of privileges, and of the supercilious contempt of the strong and forcible reasoning of Congress; whilst their petitions and remonstrances were disregarded, or were answered with additional injury and constraint, the domineering conduct of their Governors fomented the fierce indignation, which passive endurance could by no means appease. They had expressed their feelings; "they held up the subject in every light, of which it was capable;" they had submitted till non-resistance would have been a crime. Deceitful calms occasionally ensued, indicative of the tremendous calamities which would follow; the dismal forebodings of the slumbering

tempest, was seen ever and anon to burst forth frightfully upon the raging torrent; but even had they plunged into the water without mast or compass, exposed to the most shocking perils, it seems they would have arrived at the destined port. Unarmed and unprepared, as they were, they willingly defied the terrors of the conflict; for experience had informed them "that the battle was not always to the strong, but to the vigilant, the active, and the brave." War now inevitable,

"Waved her dread standard to the breeze of morn,
Pealed her loud drum, and twanged her trumpet horn."

The rays of genius, shooting forth from every quarter, began to diffuse abroad their benign influence, and all stood forth with a zeal commensurate to the momentous importance of the objects they were solicitous to defend. And indeed, the vigor and resolution, the prudence and magnanimity, which they always exhibited, was only equalled by the sublimity of the dispute in which they had embarked. For this, the comforts and delights which opulence lavishes upon its possessors were nobly sacrificed; rank and distinction mingled in the files of the common soldier, to battle for the rights of man; property and possessions, the accumulated fruits of years of industry and exertion, were left to the ravages of the foe, and were not unfrequently swept into oblivion, beneath the unrestrained sallies of the wildest passions. When the night of adversity spread her darkest veil over the face of their affairs, Despondency found no harbor in their bosoms. If a cloud occasionally lowered in the political horizon, it was hailed as the harbinger of a brighter day, pregnant with conquest and success, when the radiant effulgence of a more propitious sun would gild every prospect and illumine every vale. Misfortune, instead of damping their resolution, seemed to impart an impetus to their activity, to render them more strictly vigilant, and to quicken into life and action every dormant power. Brutus struck for Freedom and for Rome; the thunders of Demosthenes rolled at a distance from Philip and his host; Tully poured forth his

fiercest invectives, when Cataline was afar and his dagger no longer to be feared; yet the Patriots of the Revolution, in the cabinet and the field, during eleven years, contended with the mightiest monarch of the universe, and fought with unflinching determination, to arrest the iron-rod from the crimson grasp of tyranny, and to convert it into the salutary sceptre of justice and of law.

Of the many noble spirits, who bled and suffered in their endeavours to establish our independence, the names of Washington, of Montgomery, and of Warren, emblazoned upon the page of history, shall shine in all their original lustre, and shed around the name of America a halo of undying and unfading glory. When united, they form the most charming constellation that ever attracted human attention; they twinkled in those dreary days, as luminaries in a sombre sky. They were truly just men; and, had we lived in those times, we might have exclaimed of them individually, without exaggerating their merits,

“ *Si fractus illabatur orbis
Impavidum ferient rainœ.* ”

Scholars without pedantry, patriots without reproach, christians without fanaticism, and men without blemish—amidst the eminent perils which environed them, prudence and firmness appeared eminently conspicuous.

In vain the hurricane with its attendant terrors opposed its wrath; its fiery-wings flapped upon them with a hideous blaze, yet burnt not; for there was a redeeming spirit in their frames, which bid defiance to his blighting force and led them through each withering way. The battlements of heaven, disgorging their baleful contents, dissolving snows and powerful elements conspired to obstruct their marches and to interpose impediments to the progress of the inexperienced troops. But they surmounted every obstacle; nothing could overcome them. When we contrast the redolent profusion and the costly delicacies squandered in the British camp, with the deficiency, the inadequate, and frequently irregular supplies of the devoted army of

Washington, we will receive but a faint idea of the privation which they endured. Love of liberty, which cheers its votaries in the hour of trouble, calmed every pang and solaced every affliction; breathed its genial influence into the dying warrior, soothed each excruciating pain, and mitigated the corroding sorrows which would have otherwise accompanied his dissolution. "Experience was the lamp by which their feet were guided;" it glimmered upon the surrounding darkness, to encourage, enliven, and to save.

The history of the revolutions of most other nations presents a revolting picture of cruelty and of crime. It is true, their instigators are often decked with the attributes of heroes; it is true that the forgotten duty, or prostituted talents of the biographer, depicts them in the lofty sentences and glowing superlatives of passion; yet the tears of Humanity, mourning over mouldered grandeur and magnificence, weeping for the gigantic souls reposing in some deserted spot, with no flowers blooming sorrowfully over their tombs, no sweet scented rose diffusing its delicious fragrance upon the wailing wind, shower down upon them everlasting condemnation, and consign them to the records of perpetual infamy.

Pericles, Aristides, Solon, and Lycurgus, are names which would do honor to the annals of any country. Camillus, Cincinnatus, and Fabricius, are the admiration of posterity. But who will compare the stern and rigid virtues, the stormy and overwhelming eloquence of the former, or the austere and disinterested lives of the latter, to the names which are identified with the glories and splendour of the American Revolution? History, which furnishes abundant illustrations of fidelity, love of country and memorable actions, will refer us to that source for criteria of unblemished patriotism and unsullied deeds. There, in the contemplation of those times, the mind will be recreated from the perusal of the tarnished page, and receive pure and unalloyed delights.

Some men have risen, Briarean like, mid regal ruins and national dissolutions, tossing the glistening diadem to the air and hurling the thrones of ages to the earth,

others again have destroyed the resources of inhuman wretches, waging war against the feeble and unprotected, and in this way procured honorable laurels; but have afterwards turned with fury upon their homes, their countrymen, and their altars. Let no imperious pen dare give the preference to the Hannibals, the Cæsars, the Scipios, the Pompeys, or Alexanders; for Washington,

“Integer vite seleris que purus”

“Intaminatus fulget honoribus.”

Greece, whose brow once bloomed with the wreathes of Science, and whose path was strewn with the pleasant offerings of Art, has fallen from her palmy state, and the splendour of her cities has vanished from the earth. I will not point you to the site of Carthage, the sea-beaten rock, where the lonely fisherman casts his fragile line, watching with intense anxiety the breaking of the mountain billow till some solitary wave sweeps him from his precarious footing.

Rome, whose foundation was laid in strife, who so profusely banished her blood and treasure to gratify her insatiable thirst for dominion; whose flag was once and again unfurled, and flung abroad to the breeze in the phrensic fury of revolutionary madness, has been overwhelmed by the ferocious myriads poured down upon her from the wandering tribes of the North, spreading a dismal gloom over that region, which had already witnessed the blackest series of massacre and desolation:—

“Suis et ipsa Roma viribus viet.”

To the remains of these once great nations, I would direct you, fellow students, as subjects for serious reflection. Now is the proper time to acquire a knowledge of those causes which undermined such powerful governments.

Whilst we celebrate the annual return of the 4th of July, and call to remembrance the glorious resistance of our ancestors, let us not pass in silence the manly, though unsuccessful struggle maintained in other climes, to thwart the designs of oppressors, and to emerge from the narcotic mists of bondage. At the name of Ire-

land, what afflicting recollections are revived in the memory? What heart is not thrilled with horror? Paralyzed, plundered and impoverished; her interest prostrated; the hard earned coin wrung from her famishing citizens; her salubrious soil moistened by the blood of her generous, martyred, and devoted people; with the sword of persecution still reeking round the followers of the cross, she moans over the tombs of her departed hopes and her heroes. God grant that she may rise; that the fire of Freedom may be kindled about the relics of her murdered son; that it may blaze, consume and ameliorate; that the spirit of Despotism may sink groaning to the dust; that the flame may break forth, finding a holy sanctuary in every breast; that other times and other men may start at his voice, "vindicate to his motives," and write the epitaph of the immortal Emmet!

Poland has been torn, mangled, and dissevered. The mutilated corpses of Koskiowski and his compatriots, that once glowed with animation and infused the cheering aspirations of their fired souls into the lives of our suffering fathers; some of the sublime and towering spirits, who left their native land to battle in a foreign clime—to avert the menacing arm of usurped and enraged authority—to crush, in the perishing shock, the delusive hope that lingered in the halls of tyranny; who figured in the chequered scenes of the revolution; who participated in the toils and hardships which rose upon every side and at every moment; and whose labors contributed, in no slight degree, to erect the gratifying fabric of our country's freedom;—who could have predicted, under the guidance of such men, in pursuit of the same holy object, that together with the reality, their mutilated and insulted bodies would proclaim that even the semblance of liberty has vanished? It devolves upon me, to relate the lamentable truth. What heart is so callous to every generous feeling as not to vibrate with sympathy at the recital of her misfortunes? And when we hear the chains of bondage still clanking upon their frames; when we cast our eyes to the remnants of the race, and behold Oppression still haughtily triumphant; can we but return thanks to an

A mighty Providence that ours is the favorite spot, the blest abode of peace.

Fellow students, there is another subject equally exciting and momentous as that, which has thus far engaged your attention; a subject all important and absorbing; involving not the interest and prosperity; not the success; not the grandeur or the exaltation of our Republic; not the renown or terror of our name; not our commerce, whitening every sea with her sails; not our happiness; not alone the honored altar of our constitution; but comprehending in its decision our existence as a people, as christians, as men. Our times are critical beyond description.

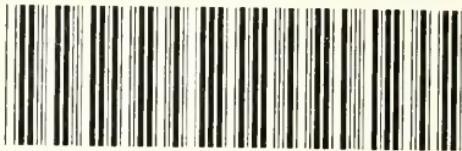
“Nubila sunt subitas tempora nostra malis.” — Ovid.

We stand upon a precipice: beneath, the demons of civil war, of rapine, and of devastation, forge the winged thunderbolt: around us, glow the dying embers of freedom: above, in the pale and sad looking watch-tower, sits the guardian angel of America, pensive and alone. Do we mean to cling to our inheritance, or to obscure the deeds of our ancestors? Do we mean to sink their memory to oblivion? If not, whither do we tend? The most indifferent observer sees the salutary admonitions of the Father of his Country disregarded by a degenerate posterity—traces the pernicious effects of faction, party strife and sectional prejudices, and sees the saving influence of the patriot despised, neglected, and overwhelmed. Anarchy, arrayed in all its fierceness, has driven his gory car through the most opulent and flourishing cities: turbulence has reigned despotic, ruling by its arbitrary will—tearing asunder the bands which connect the States, and threatening the Union with endless calamities. Differences have been revived amongst us; yet what Cataline, or what Cethegus, will hurl, with sacrilegious violence, the signal spear? Agitation has succeeded agitation, and excitement followed excitement. The cohesive qualities of mutual concession and forbearance, the anchor of our safety, will calm the angry waters of the rivulet, will still the rocking pyramid of Union, at whose base the generous plant, which sprung and grew in England

but which withered under the poisonous blast of Scottish rule, shall put forth its branches and flourish. Cherished in a propitious soil, it shall pierce the heavens; sheltering under its salubrious and interminable shade all the unfortunate of the human race.

Convey yourselves to our legislative halls; select from them those who merge every passion in the love of country, men of strong and sober judgment, sublime and brilliant qualifications; who approach the defects of the Constitution as the wounds of a parent, with trembling fear and awful solicitude; who apply the remedy, after cool and dispassionate deliberation, consultation destitute of all sharp ingredients, sudden in their operations, but wholly compounded of those which are sure and steady; compare them with their opponents, and their number, though zealous, fervent, and immovable, dwindle to insignificance. Aware of the opinion which has obtained in Europe, with regard to our form of government, knowing that upon our ultimate success, depends the happiness of unborn millions; believing that those who now slumber in the vilest and most odious bondage, may one day rise with the shackles falling from their limbs; beholding the propitious rays of Republicanism dissipating the vapours which overshadow the regions of the despot; imagining we hear the piercing, thrilling cry of rebuke issuing from our ancestral graves—how solemn should we feel is our trust, how immense, how ineffable our obligations! Here then, we, who will one day enter upon the world, and to whom in part the destinies of America will be entrusted, should mark the conduct of the vicious and designing with unqualified condemnation, and imbibe, from the pure and unpolluted fountain of wisdom and integrity, sentiments which “will strengthen with our strength, and grow with our growth;” sentiments favorable above all to union radically repugnant to discord and dissension, and hostile to every thing calculated to produce them. Let us carefully peruse the affectionate admonitions of the venerated Patriot; lest his insulted shade, leaving its narrow house tenantless and deserted, flit across our path and haunt us in the hour of repose.

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